



10/510294
PCT/GB 2003/001333



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3. Full name, address and postcode of the or of each applicant (*underline all surnames*)Reckitt Benckiser N.V.
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NETHERLANDSPatents ADP number (*if you know it*)

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Device

5. Name of your agent (*if you have one*)Andrew Stephen BROWN
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DEVICE

The present invention relates to a device, and to a kit and a process, for delivering a fabric treatment agent to 5 a fabric, particularly, although not exclusively, for delivering a fabric treatment agent to a fabric in a washing machine.

Water-based laundering and non-aqueous based laundering, 10 commonly referred to as dry cleaning, processes are well known and are fundamentally different, but both may be used to clean fabrics and impart to the fabrics a fresh appearance and fragrance.

15 Suitably, it may be undesirable to employ a water based laundering process because certain fabrics may shrink due to contact with water. Additionally, water based laundering processes may cause undesirable bleeding or blending of dyes from a fabric which may not only affect 20 that fabric but also other fabrics being laundered at the same time. Furthermore, some oily soils may not be readily removed during a water-based laundering process.

Suitably, as a consequence of the aforementioned problems 25 associated with a water-based laundering process, it may be necessary and/or desirable to subject some fabrics to a non-aqueous based laundering process. Traditional commercial and industrial non-aqueous based laundering processes involve immersing the fabric in a non-aqueous 30 solvent, such as a hydrocarbon, carbon dioxide or chlorohydrocarbon. However, such processes, in comparison to domestic water-based laundering processes, are

typically regarded as relatively costly, time consuming and inconvenient.

More recently, processes have been developed with a view
5 to performing a substitute for a dry cleaning process using a conventional hot air clothes dryer. Suitably, these processes employ a container, e.g. a bag, within which the fabric and cleaning composition are placed. The
10 bag opening is secured and the bag is placed inside the hot air clothes dryer. The heat and tumbling action

..... of the dryer causes the
15 cleaning agent to contact the fabric, thereby cleaning the fabric and imparting the fabric with a fresh appearance and fragrance. The vapour may be purged from the bag during the drying cycle through vents or other gas-permeable areas of the bag.

Such dry cleaning processes using a hot air clothes dryer and a bag are not however completely free from
20 disadvantages, as it may be difficult to deliver the cleaning agent uniformly to the fabric due to the bags failing to assume and maintain a desirable volume during the tumbling cycle. Moreover, if the cleaning agent is in the form of a sheet material, then the sheet material may
25 become entangled with the fabric which may not only further hinder uniform release of the agent throughout the fabric, but also it is typically necessary to disentangle the sheet material manually from the fabric upon completion of the drying cycle, which is inconvenient and
30 time consuming. A still further disadvantage with using a hot air clothes dryer is that although dryers are typically more readily available in developed countries, albeit not affordable to every household, they are much

less readily available and affordable in developing countries. They are also uncommon in many hot countries, whether developed or developing.

5 The present invention seeks to solve the aforementioned technical problems with delivering a fabric treatment agent to a fabric article, in particular, delivering a fabric treatment agent to a fabric article without subjecting the fabric to a water-based laundering process.

10

According to a first aspect, the present invention provides a process for delivering a fabric treatment agent to a fabric comprising:

15 providing a device comprising a fabric treatment agent releasably attached to a flexible substrate, wherein the flexible substrate is attached or retained within, preferably attached, to a rigid support;
20 placing the device and a fabric inside a water impermeable container;
placing the water impermeable container inside a washing machine; and
operating the washing machine.

25 Such a process is referred to hereinafter as the process of the present invention.

Suitably, the process of the present invention seeks to solve the aforementioned problems associated with
30 delivering a fabric treatment agent to a fabric by employing a water based laundering process yet keeping the fabric separate from the water.

It will be appreciated that any standard domestic and/or industrial washing machine (e.g. front or top loader) may be employed in the process of the present invention.

5 Suitably, the rigid support may be such as to prevent the flexible substrate from entangling with the fabric.

Suitably, the rigid support may maintain the flexible substrate in an uncrumpled form during the process of the present invention. In particular, the rigid support may 10 maintain the flexible substrate in a substantially flat orientation whilst

flex between moderately concave forms. This may not only permit increased delivery of the fabric treatment agent from the substrate but also it may promote uniform 15 delivery of the fabric treatment agent to the fabric (in typically, throughout the laundry load of multiple fabric articles), thereby resulting in an increased even dispersal of the fabric treatment agent to the fabric.

Moreover, the process of the present invention employs a 20 washing machine that is typically more common, particularly in developing and hot countries, than a conventional hot air dryer. Thus, the process of the present invention may be more economically viable and have wider applicability, than a comparable process employing a 25 hot air clothes dryer.

By the term "fabric" or "fabric articles" or "laundry load" as used herein we include not only clothing, but other items which are laundered such as sheets, draperies, 30 rugs, upholstery coverings and towels. Preferably, the fabric employed in the process of the present invention is a dry fabric.

Suitably, the water impermeable container includes an opening to permit the fabric and device to be placed in the container. Suitably, where the container includes an opening, the opening is sealed with a watertight seal
5 before placing the container in the washing machine.

Suitably, the opening of the container may be sealed by, for example, a linear closure device, face to face sealing of plastics surfaces (which may rely on the properties of the plastics or may employ a water impermeable adhesive),
10 heat sealing or a noose - for example a plastic ring tie or a filament or string, or in the case of a rigid container, a lid.

Preferably, the water impermeable container as defined
15 herein is thermally stable and stable to water so that it may be suitable for use in a washing machine, which may operate at temperatures of less than or equal to 60°C.

Preferably, the water impermeable container is stable in
20 water at temperatures of less than or equal to 75°C, preferably less than or equal to 90°C, most preferably less than or equal to 100°C.

Preferably, the water impermeable container is stable in
25 water at temperatures of greater than or equal to 20°C, more preferably greater than or equal to 30°C, most preferably greater than or equal to 40°C during the process of the present invention.

30 Suitably, the water impermeable container is formed from a plastic material by techniques well known to those skilled in the art such as thermoforming, blow moulding and injection moulding. Preferably, the plastic material

comprises a polyester, a polyamide (e.g. nylon 6 or nylon 6,6), a polyvinyl chloride (e.g. PVC) and/or a polyolefin (e.g. polyethylene). Preferably, the water impermeable container as defined herein is constructed from a flexible material. Most preferably, the water impermeable container is in the form of a bag or a pouch.

Preferably, in the process of the present invention, the washing machine is operated in the wash cycle. Further, 10 preferably the washing machine is not operated in the

not subjected to high spinning speeds. If the washing machine is operated in the wash cycle, then the water impermeable container, particularly a container 15 constructed from a flexible material, may maintain a desirable volume during the process of the present invention. Suitably, this may enhance uniform delivery of the fabric treatment agent to the fabric.

20 Suitably, the washing machine is operated so that the temperature of the water in the machine is less than or equal to 100°C, preferably less than or equal to 90°C, more preferably less than or equal to 75°C, most preferably less than or equal to 60°C.

25 Suitably, the washing machine is operated so that the temperature of water in the machine is greater than or equal to 20°C, more preferably greater than or equal to 30°C, most preferably greater than or equal to 40°C.

30 A particularly preferred temperature range of the water in the washing machine is greater than or equal to 40°C to less than or equal to 60°C.

Suitably, in the process of the present invention, the washing machine, containing the container, is operated for less than or equal to 1 hour 30 minutes, preferably less than or equal to 1 hour 15 minutes, preferably less than or equal to 1 hour, most preferably less than or equal to 45 minutes.

10 Suitably, in the process of the present invention, the washing machine, containing the container, is operated for greater than or equal to 15 minutes, more preferably greater than or equal to 20 minutes, most preferably greater than or equal to 30 minutes.

15 Suitably, the rigid support may be attached to the flexible substrate by any suitable attachment means for example by water-resistant adhesives, by use of heat or by mechanical fastening, for example, clips, Velcro™ strips, and/or piercing means which pierce and attach the flexible 20 substrate to the support. Suitably, the attachment means may be an integral structure of the rigid support and/or a structure separate from the support. Preferably, the attachment means are an integral structure of the support.

25 Preferably, the rigid support is releasably attached to the substrate. Conveniently, this permits the support to be re-used, thereby decreasing the expenditure required when the flexible substrate is exhausted. Conveniently, the support and flexible substrate of the device may be 30 manufactured and sold separately.

Preferably, the rigid support comprises a two-piece construction. Suitably, the two-piece construction may

comprise two separate support members engageable with each other. Alternatively, the rigid support comprises a one-piece construction. Suitably the one-piece construction may comprise two interconnected support members relatively moveable, to hold or release the flexible substrate. More preferably, the support comprises a two-piece construction and a part of the flexible substrate is releasably held by the support. For example, the two pieces of the support may be attached to each other by one or more hinges. The one or more hinges may be a separate structure from the support and/or may be attached between the two pieces of the support. Alternatively, or additionally, the two pieces of the support may be joined together by snap fit engagement of the two pieces.

According to a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the support as defined herein comprises a frame. Most preferably, the frame is an endless frame. More preferably, a part of the flexible substrate is attached, preferably releasably attached, to the frame. Suitably, securing the flexible substrate in a frame may increase and maintain the effective surface area of the flexible substrate for contacting laundry during use, compared to a substrate not secured in a frame. Suitably, increased amounts of fabric treatment agent may be dispersed from and more uniformly throughout the laundry from the device compared to a flexible substrate not secured in a frame.

Typically, the support of the device of the present invention is thermally stable so that it may be suitable for use in a washing machine which may operate at temperatures of 20°C to 100°C, preferably 40°C to 60°C.

Suitably, the support may be wholly or partially rigid. Preferably, the support is totally rigid. Typically, the support is formed from a plastic material such as soft touch materials, such as, thermoplastic elastomer 5 materials and silicone rubber, or conventional thermoplastic materials, such as, polyethylene, polypropylene or polyvinylchloride by techniques well known to those skilled in the art such as thermoforming, blow-moulding and injection moulding. As an alternative 10 metal can be used in the production of the rigid support. In the alternative where the rigid support attaches to the flexible substrate then it may take simple forms such as a cross or a frame. In the alternative where the flexible substrate is held within the rigid support then an opening 15 is provided for the insertion of the flexible substrate and also for exit of the active materials on the flexible sheet form the flexible substrate, this may be the opening or from an additional opening, and optionally a closure is provided to the opening for insertion of the flexible 20 substrate.

Preferably, the flexible substrate comprises a fibrous material. Suitably, the fibrous material may comprise woven and/or non-woven fibres that are adhesively or 25 thermally bonded together by techniques well known to those skilled in the art. Preferably, the fibrous material is a non-woven fibrous material. The fibrous material may be a natural fibre, such as wool, silk, jute, hemp, cotton. Alternatively, or additionally, the fibrous 30 material may be a synthetic fibre, such as rayon, a polyester, a polyamide, a polyvinyl derivative, a polyacrylate or a polyolefin.

Suitably, any diameter or dernier of fibre is useful in the flexible substrate of the device of the present invention. In the case of staple fibres, fibre lengths may vary from about 0.5 cm to 5 cm. In the case of spun bonded webs, the fibre lengths may be indefinite.

Suitably, when the flexible substrate comprises a fibrous material as defined herein the total basis weight of the substrate including the fabric treatment agent releasably attached thereto is greater than or equal to 25 g/m², more preferably greater than or equal to 35 g/m².

Suitably, when the flexible substrate comprises a fibrous material as defined herein, the total basis weight of the substrate including the fabric treatment agent releasably attached thereto is less than or equal to 65 g/m², more preferably less than or equal to 60 g/m², most preferably less than or equal to 55 g/m².

Most preferably, the flexible substrate is a flexible sheet or cloth, particularly a flexible sheet comprising a fibrous material as defined above. Suitably, the flexible sheet is greater than or equal to 0.5 mm thick. Suitably, the flexible sheet is less than or equal to 5 mm thick. Suitably, the flexible sheet has an area of 10 to 150 cm².

Suitably, the flexible substrate as defined herein comprises a porous structure. Typically, the flexible substrate includes a void volume of greater than or equal to 40%, more preferably greater than or equal to 50%, preferably greater than or equal to 60%, preferably greater than or equal to 70%, most preferably greater than

or equal to 80% of the total volume of the flexible substrate.

5 Suitably, the property of permeability of the flexible substrate may permit a fabric conditioning agent to be selectively or uniformly deposited throughout the flexible substrate.

10 Suitably, the flexible substrate as defined herein is thermally stable so that it may be suitable for use in a washing machine, which may operate at temperatures of less than or equal to 100°C, more preferably less than or equal to 95°C. Preferably, the flexible substrate is thermally stable at temperatures of 20°C to 100°C.

15 Preferably, the fabric treatment agent comprises a fabric cleaning agent. Preferred fabric treatment agents are well known to those skilled in the art and include: **surfactants and fragrance.**

20 Preferably, the fabric treatment agent comprises a fabric softening agent. Suitable fabric softening agents are well known to those skilled in the art and include: cationic quaternary ammonium salts such as quaternary imidazolinium salts; non-ionic compounds such as tertiary phosphine oxides; anionic soaps, sulfates and sulfonates e.g. fatty acid soaps and ethoxylated alcohol sulfates; and amphoteric tertiary ammonium compounds; and compatible mixtures of one or more of these softening agents. A 25 particularly preferred softening agent is.

30 Alternatively, or additionally, the fabric treatment agent may comprise an anti-static agent, an anti-creasing agent,

an antimicrobial agent, a fragrance, and/or an odour masking or absorbing agent.

Suitably, the flexible substrate comprises greater than or 5 equal to 2.5 wt%, more preferably greater than or equal to 5 wt%, but preferably less than or equal to 10 wt% of the fabric treatment agent as defined herein.

Suitably, the flexible substrate comprises less than or 10 equal to 25 wt%, more preferably less than or equal to 20 wt% of the fabric treatment agent as defined herein.

Suitably, the fabric treatment agent(s) is releasably attached to the flexible substrate by techniques well 15 known to those skilled in the art. For example, the fabric treatment agent(s) may be dispersed/dissolved in a solvent system comprising an organic solvent and/or an aqueous solvent, optionally with the application of heat e.g. 70°C to 85°C, and the resultant dispersion/solution deposited 20 onto the flexible substrate as defined herein by dipping, spraying or brushing. Suitably, the organic solvent and/or aqueous solvent is permitted to evaporate from the flexible substrate to provide the substrate impregnated with a dried fabric treatment agent(s).

25

Preferably, the fabric treatment agent as defined herein is releasable from the substrate by heating the substrate. Suitably, the fabric treatment agent softens within the operating temperature range of a washing machine, such as 30 between 20°C to 100°C, preferably 40°C to 60°C, so that it is released from the flexible substrate during the process of the present invention.

Suitably, the fabric treatment agent is released from the substrate at a temperature of greater than or equal to 20°C, more preferably greater than or equal to 30°C, most preferably greater than or equal to 40°C.

5

Suitably, the fabric treatment agent is released from the flexible substrate at a temperature of less than or equal to 75°C, more preferably less than or equal to 90°C, most preferably less than or equal to 100°C.

10

A particularly preferred temperature range at which the fabric treatment agent is released from the flexible substrate is greater than or equal to 40°C to less than or equal to 60°C.

15

Alternatively, or additionally, the fabric treatment agent is released from the flexible substrate upon agitation of the flexible substrate, particularly upon rubbing contact with a fabric.

20

According to a second aspect of the present invention, there is provided a device as defined hereinbefore for delivering a fabric treatment agent to a fabric, comprising a fabric treatment agent as defined hereinbefore releasably attached to a flexible substrate as defined hereinbefore, wherein the flexible substrate is attached to or contained within a rigid support as defined hereinbefore.

Such a device is referred to as the device of the present invention.

According to a third aspect, the present invention provides a method for manufacturing the device of the present invention.

5 According to a fourth aspect, the present invention provides a cleaning kit comprising a device of the present invention and a water impermeable container as defined hereinbefore. Preferably, the water impermeable container comprise a bag or pouch. Preferably, when the water
10 impermeable container comprises a bag or pouch, then the
means as defined hereinbefore. Preferably, the kit includes a plurality of flexible substrates, and a smaller plurality of supports or, preferably, a single support.

15 According to a fifth aspect, the present invention provides the use of a flexible substrate as defined hereinbefore attached to or contained within a rigid support as defined hereinbefore for delivering a fabric
20 treatment agent as defined hereinbefore to a fabric, wherein the fabric treatment agent is releasably attached to the flexible substrate. Preferably, the fabric is placed in a water impermeable container, most preferably the fabric is placed in a water impermeable container that
25 is loaded in a washing machine.

It will be appreciated that any of the features set forth in the first aspect of the present invention, may be regarded as preferred features of the second, third, fourth and fifth aspects of the present invention.

The present invention will now be illustrated by way of the following non-limiting examples, in which:-

Figure 1 is a perspective view of the device of the present invention.

5 Figure 2 is a perspective view of the component parts of the device of Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows a non-woven cellulose derived cloth having surfactant, solvent and fragrance impregnated (2) held in 10 a rigid oval-shaped plastic frame (4). As is more clearly shown in Figure 2, the frame (4) comprises an upper part (6) and a lower part (8). The upper part (6) includes one or more protrusions (not shown) extending from a surface thereof. The lower part (8) includes one or more recesses 15 (not shown) in a surface thereof. The recesses of the lower part (8) are dimensioned to receive the protrusions of the upper part (6), so that the upper part (6) snap fits into the lower part (8), thereby holding the cloth (2) therebetween.

20 Figure 2 shows a rigid plastic container into which a non-woven cellulose sheet as described in Figure 1 can be inserted.

25 In use, dry clothing or other fabrics to be treated are loaded into a plastic bag along with the device of the present invention. The plastic bag is sealed with a plastic tie to form a watertight seal. The bag is loaded into a washing machine, and the washing machine operated 30 in the wash cycle at a water temperature of 40°C to 60°C for 45 minutes, thus dispersing the fabric treatment agent evenly onto the fabric. Water is drained automatically from the washing machine and the bag removed from the

machine. The tie is removed from the bag, then the fabric and the device of the present invention removed from the interior of the bag. The fabric exhibits a clean and fresh appearance.

5

Alternatively, after the wash water has drained from the washing machine, the bag may remain in the machine during the rinse cycle and/or during a spin drying cycle.

Claims

1. A process for delivering a fabric treatment agent to a fabric comprising:

5

providing a device comprising a fabric treatment agent releasably attached to a flexible substrate, wherein the flexible substrate is attached to or contained within a rigid support;

10

placing the device and a fabric inside a water impermeable container;

15

placing the water impermeable container inside a washing machine; and

operating the washing machine.

20

2. A process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the washing machine is operated in the wash cycle.

25

3. A process as claimed in claim 1 or 2 wherein the washing machine is operated so that the temperature of the water in the washing machine is greater than or equal to 40°C.

30

4. A process as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the washing machine is operated so that the temperature of the water in the washing machine is less than or equal to 60°C.

5. A process as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the water impermeable container comprises a bag or pouch.
- 5 6. A process as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the rigid support is releasably attached to the flexible substrate.
- 10 7. A process as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the rigid support comprises a frame and a part of the flexible substrate is held in the frame.
- 15 8. A process as claimed in claim 7 wherein the frame is an endless frame.
9. A process as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the flexible substrate comprises a fibrous material.
- 20 10. A process as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the flexible substrate is in the form of a sheet or cloth.
- 25 11. A process as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the fabric treatment agent comprises a fabric softening agent and/or a fabric cleaning agent.
- 30 12. A process as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the fabric treatment agent is releasable from the flexible substrate by heating the substrate and/or by agitating the substrate.

13. A device as defined in any one of the preceding claims for delivering a fabric treatment agent to a fabric.

5

14. A cleaning kit for delivering a fabric treatment agent to a fabric comprising a device as defined in any one of claims 1 to 12 and a water impermeable container as defined in any one of claims 1 to 12.

10

15. Use of a device as defined in any one of claims 1 to 12 for delivering a fabric treatment agent to a fabric in a water impermeable container.

15

16. A device substantially as described herein with reference to the description and drawings.

20

17. A process for delivering a fabric treatment agent to a fabric substantially as described herein with reference to the description and drawings.

Abstract**DEVICE**

5 A process for delivering a fabric treatment agent to a fabric comprising:

providing a device comprising a fabric treatment agent releasably attached to a flexible substrate, wherein the flexible substrate is attached to or is within a rigid support;

placing the device and a fabric inside a water impermeable container;

placing the water impermeable container inside a washing machine; and

15 operating the washing machine.

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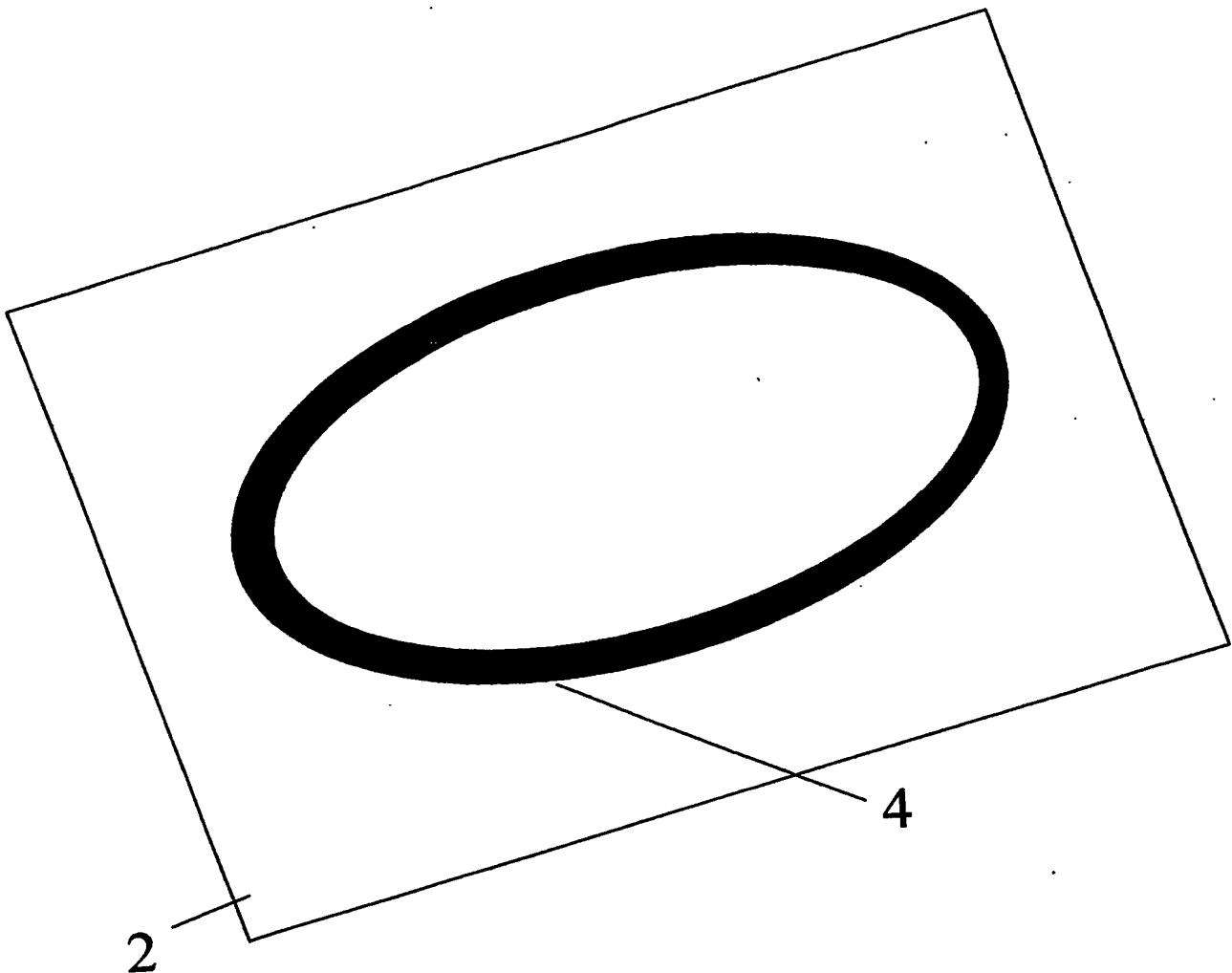


Fig.1

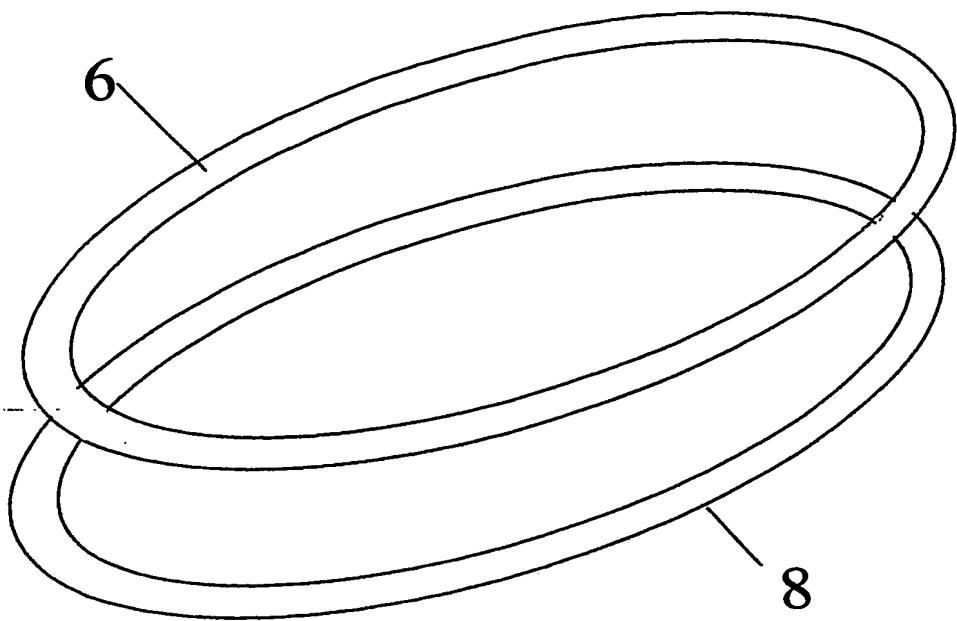


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